

## **Legislative Update – March 5, 2012**

I have had the honor to serve the citizens of the 64th District for 2 months. During this time, the House of Delegates has passed 607 pieces of legislation while the Senate has passed 514 pieces. Contrary to the perception created by some in the media, the primary focus for 2012 General Assembly was and is creating an environment where education and business can flourish. In fact, 43% of the bills passed in the House pertain to job creation, education, government reform and public safety. Only 2% of all bills passed are related to social issues.

### **Constitutional Amendment – Property Rights**

In 2005 Supreme Court in *Kelo v. New London* upheld the right of governments to take private property for economic development projects. In response, the Virginia General Assembly has passed a measure that would make it harder for government to seize property by eminent domain. The eminent domain reform amendment is needed because there have already been legislative attempts to chip away at the current statutes. The amendment more strictly defines the term “public use” and establishes that “just compensation includes compensation for demonstrable lost profits and lost access. In order to amend the Virginia Constitution, the proposed amendment must pass the General Assembly twice, with an election in between, and then must be approved by Virginia voters through a referendum. This property rights amendment will be on the November 2012 ballot.

### **2012 State Budget**

With less than a week remaining in the 2012 General Assembly Session, Senate Democrats have defeated both budget bills that have come before them, leaving the General Assembly at a standstill on the budget. There have been budget standoffs in years past including 2001, 2004, and 2006; however, those disagreements were over specific items in the budget and those disagreements did not involve one party in one chamber completely blocking progress on the budget.

In the House of Delegates, we worked with Democrats to pass a fiscally responsible budget with bipartisan support. During the Floor debate on the House Budget, House Minority Leader David Toscano publicly thanked Republicans for including Democrats in the process and for having the opportunity to give their input. There is a lot to like in the House Budget for both sides of the aisle. The House Budget is a structurally balanced budget that contains targeted funding increases in core areas of government including job growth, education, public safety, and health care, all without raising taxes or fees.

Even the House Democrat Caucus Chairman said after the budget vote that many of the Democrats' no votes were not "super hard no" votes against the House Budget and went on to explain the reasons why some ultimately voted against it. In the end, one third of the House Democrats joined with House Republicans in supporting the House Budget that passed on a 79-21 vote.

In stark contrast to the actions in the House of Delegates, Senate Democrats have voted twice against the passage of a state budget and brought the budget process to a halt. With Lt. Governor Bolling unable to cast a tie-breaking vote on budget matters, Senate Democrats have used this opportunity to obstruct the budget process. Senate Democrats have openly admitted they are blocking progress on the budget process until they receive better committee assignments. On the first day of Session, Lt. Governor Bolling exercised his constitutional authority to cast a tie-breaking vote to organize Senate Committees. These obstructionist ways are what so many have come to expect from Washington, and it is disappointing to see these Washington-style tactics make their way into the Virginia General Assembly.

Despite the Senate Democrats' best efforts to stop the budget process, all House Democrats joined with House Republicans on Thursday to support Delegate Lacey Putney's motion to introduce new budget bills and keep the budget process moving. This late in Session, any delegate introducing legislation needs unanimous consent of all delegates to introduce the proposed legislation.

What would it mean if Virginia did not pass a budget by July 1st? Simply put, funding for most all state employees and agencies would cease and state government would essentially shut down. Each day the Senate Democrats block passage of a state budget, they put at risk funding for our schools, our roads, and more. Virginia colleges, universities, and public schools are in the process of developing their budgets and need to know how much state funding to expect. Each day Senate Democrats refuse to pass a budget, they are adding to the growing uncertainty among our local boards of supervisors, city councils, school boards, and boards of visitors as they try to budget for the next fiscal year. Each day they refuse to pass a budget, they are forcing our state government one step closer to a shutdown.

We have less than a week left before we are scheduled to adjourn. We all must work together to fulfill our obligation to all Virginians to pass a state budget. As time dwindles, I hope Senate Democrats will cease their obstructionist ways and move forward in a sensible manner – "The Virginia Way" – to ensure Virginia's government is working to meet its responsibilities to the citizens of the Commonwealth.

## **In-District Office Hours**

At the close of the 2012 Legislative Session, I will be holding in-district office hours on the following dates in the following locations:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Time</b>
Wednesday, April 4, 2012	Surry Community Center 205 Enos Farm Drive, Surry	2 PM – 5 PM
Tuesday, April 10, 2012	Smithfield Library 255 James Street, Smithfield	3 PM – 5 PM
Tuesday, April 17, 2012	Prince George Library 6605 Courts Drive, Prince George	2 PM – 5 PM
Wednesday, April 25, 2012	Franklin Public Library 280 N. College Drive, Franklin	2 PM – 5 PM

Please do not hesitate to contact me. I can be reached by phone at (804) 698-1064, by email at [delrmorris@house.virginia.gov](mailto:delrmorris@house.virginia.gov), or on my website at [www.delrickmorris.com](http://www.delrickmorris.com). Check my website calendar page for information regarding in-district office hours and town hall meetings in Prince George County, Town of Smithfield and City of Franklin. Please continue to keep me updated on issues that are important to you and your family.